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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a study examining the lives of women (N=9) involved as either mentors or proteges in the U.S. Postal Service's Maintenance Leadership Program. Participant interviews consisted of the completion of several instruments including a personality inventory, a measure of agentic versus communal values, an instrument that examines masculine and feminine approaches to spirituality and work, and a spirituality inventory. The women in this study are unique in having been selected for a highly competitive program and for selecting a non-traditional career. Results show that the dye was cast in childhood, as participants were involved in non-traditional play. They report that they are not religious, but eight reported communicating with something that transcends them and influences their lives. They by and large come from Middle America and are middle to lower income. They completed traditional female type chores as children, and most are married and have children of their own. Birth order seems to have nothing to do with who they have become. Participants are equally family and work oriented, and are women who want to provide, as well as nurture. They get job satisfaction from competence, intellectual stimulation, empowerment, and success, and these are far more important to them than traditional executive power. For the most part, they are open, team players. (Contains 1 figure, 4 tables, and 13 references.) (MKA)

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Female Spirituality, Careering and the US Postal Service, Maintenance Division

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For the past thirty years psychology has hosted discussions relative to gender role theory. Jean Baker Miller (1976) argued that psychological issues should be viewed from a female perspective and suggested that if this were the case greater emphasis would be placed not only on intellectual development but on emotional and social development as well. Also, in the seventies, many began to think that not only women, but men as well, were unhappy and uncomfortable with stereotyped sex roles. (Bem 1974, 1977; Spence and Hemreich, 1978). Bem (1974) argued that androgynous people, men and women, were more healthy than non-androgenous folk, and she developed the BEM Sex Role Inventory so that the subject could be studied. Gilligan (1982, 1996) has consistantly argued that females are more relationship oriented than males, and she has also suggested that in contrast to the emotional relationship bonds that women prize, achievement and autonomy are more largely the domain of males. Deborah Tannen (1990) distinguishes between women talk and men talk by calling the former rapport talk and the latter, report talk, meaning that women make conversation while men give information. In her book, *Integrative Life Planning*, Hansen (1997 summarizes theories of women's development and gender role issues. She also discusses in detail several researchers' thoughts about male agency and female communality, a dualistic theory that Bakan (1996) posited over thirty years ago. Despite recent trends to reduce the controversy, the debate over androgeny continues, even if reconstructed and repackaged into the category of "transcendent sexuality."

During the past four years a unique population of women emerged that we thought might shed light on the subject. This population is the universe of women (nine) who have been selected to be participants in the Maintenance Leadership Development Program of the United States Postal Service. In

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order to understand how unique this population is, consider that the Postal Service employs over 800,000 people. Of these, 42,000 are in Maintenance. (Carver, Gallaher, Humphrey, 1999). People who work in maintenance rather than in operations are custodians, mechanics, electronics technicians, and maintenance control personnel. They take care of everything from equipment parts to large facilities and keep ever larger and more technical equipment operational. Of the 42,000 people in maintenance, most are former military men, only 5% of the total are female, and most of these 2,100 women are custodians. In the Postal Service, 90% of the hires do not move from their position of hire, which means that only 80,000 people, ever become managers. If statistics hold, 4,200 maintenance personnel become managers, and approximately 200 women have that opportunity. Of the 200 existing female maintenance managers only nine women (and seventy-one men) have been selected to participate in the Maintenance Leadership Development Program, a mentoring project designed to train top management for the future. Ten proteges and ten mentors have been selected for this program each year for the past four years because corporate maintenance management has perceived a need to provide candidates for the positions of maintenance manager. They want managers who are not only knowledgeable of the maintenance function, but managers who can relate as well. The Maintenance Leadership Development Program requires considerable individual initiative.

The program is a two year developmental program. It involves intensive and extensive educational and occupational activities. Approximately one half of the program is technical. Mentors as well as Proteges go through a rigorous selection process. Nevertheless, participation is voluntary. The program provides maximum flexibility to fulfill the needs of both the individuals selected and the organization. The mentors (facilitators) in this program have a formal relationship with the proteges for the 24-month period, and a continuing informal relationship beyond the program. Proteges are qualified maintenance supervisors and managers from field offices who seek development as potential candidates for the highest position of Manager, Maintenance. They must have a track record of technical proficiency

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and self-development and be seeking more of both. Proteges selected should be goal oriented, possess good human relations skills, and be able to:

- communicate orally and in writing
- supervise the work of other people – including planning, organizing, directing, monitoring, and evaluating ; meet organizational goals.
- set individual developmental goals
- assume responsibility for one's own growth and development
- apply supervisory and management skills
- demonstrate knowledge of:
    - maintenance to everyone, both within the maintenance division and within the division of postal operations
    - energy and environmental policy
    - Predictive Maintenance
    - metrics, end-of-run reports, and quality processes
    - maintenance of data base information

Mentors must provide leadership, performance, evaluation, focus, guidance, developmental counseling, resources, and networking to a specific protégé. This may be viewed as a "coaching" relationship which is in two stages: a formal first-stage within the developmental program, and a continuing, possibly career long, mentoring stage. The mentor acts as a role model throughout the relationship.

Responsibilities of mentors are to:

- Set an example for the protégé
- Be a coach and friend to the protégé
- Be there for the protégé

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- Participate, in consensus, as a team member with the other mentors
- Work within the parameters of the program
- Commit the time required for the program
- Be politically sensitive
- Join and be active in a professional organization
- Regularly read professional journals
- Attend management training courses outside the United States Postal Service

Each mentor has exemplary, ethical and professional behavior. He or she has excellent interpersonal skills, and demonstrates a willingness to develop a long-term professional/interpersonal relationship with a protégé. Each mentor has personally been involved in developing another employee within the past two years.

The outcome of the program is to provide the company with a cadre of highly capable and highly mobile maintenance professionals who will fill future maintenance management positions. By the end of the program all proteges will communicate with staff, upper management, peers, customers, vendors, and unions to interpret and filter information to meet the focus of the company. Proteges will also demonstrate proficiency in written and verbal communication. They will exhibit self development through the completion of a college degree or college level courses, demonstrate the drive/motivation to develop others, and the continuing desire to learn. Proteges will understand statistical process control and use problem solving skills. They will also develop long-range strategies that incorporate technology, individual initiative, and corporate initiatives within achievable budgets. They will develop analyze and plan based on metrics data. Additionally, proteges will possess interpersonal skills and be passionate, visionary, perceptive, and empathetic. Proteges will develop a philosophy that encompasses organizational values that are personally effective.

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The nine women selected for the Maintenance Leadership Development Program during the past four years have been both proteges (5) and mentors (4). The four women mentors had either female or male proteges, and the five female proteges had either female or male mentors. Generally, they did not pair with each other.

For this study, all nine women were interviewed extensively on the telephone by two interviewers for at least one hour. They were also administered several instruments, including the BARS (Piedmont, 1999), a personality inventory that yields information on 5 personality factors and correlates well with the Neo-Pir. They were also given the LCI (Rayburn, Hansen, Siderits, Burson and Richmond, 1999), a measure of agentic versus communal values, the ISAW (Rayburn, Richmond (1999), which examines traditionally masculine and feminine approaches to both spirituality and work, and the IS (Rayburn, Richmond 1996, 1997), which inventories spirituality.

Before discussing the results of this assessment, we will discuss characteristics of the sample. These were by in large gained from the interview. The women in the sample ranged in age from 36 to 54 years with a mean of 47 years of age. Five were married, and 4 were not. Of those who were not, two were widows, one was divorced, and one had never married. Two were African-American, one was Hispanic, and the other six were Anglo-Americans. Five had been raised Protestant, three Catholic and one, agnostic. All have had some college; one held a masters degree, four held bachelors degrees, and four have had college less than a bachelors degree. Five were raised in rural areas, two in a large city, one in the suburbs, and one in a small town. Interesting to this group is that there is nothing consistent about birth order. All but one of the women claimed to be spiritual. (Spiritual for this study implies some sense of the transcendent.) All but one claimed to have personal communication with God. Nevertheless, only one said that she was religious. Equally interesting is that none came from well to do homes. All but one claimed to be "tomboy" whose childhood play was baseball, war, marbles, tag or Cowboys and Indians. Most reported that they were the General or the Chief. None were in "masculine" or non-traditional careers before entering the Postal Service. Six entered the Postal Service as clerks and one entered as a

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letter sorting machine operator, a position occupied largely by women. Two were letter carriers, a more male dominant job. Several had fathers who left home, or were abusive. Figure 1 summarizes this data.

FIGURE 1

Characteristics of the Sample

	Prior Job	Race	College Degree	Religion	Siblings Family	Lived	Play	Chores	Marital Status
Subject 1 Protégé	Letter Carrier Bookkeeper at Propane factory	C	MS	P Spiritual/NR Relationship w/God	Oldest of 4 girls Dad left home Mom had job in food industry	Small town. Moved a lot	Boy games War Baseball Cowboys	Yes. Babysitting & cooking.	M
Subject 2 Protégé	Accounts Receivable Clerk/Secretary	AA	Some college. 80 semesters hours. Wanted to be a Chem. Engr.	P Spiritual Not religious. Talks to God.	1 older sister Dad drank, was abusive. Parents divorced. Mother Supervisor at USPS	City	Sports Tomboy Volleyball Baseball Some dolls.	Cleaned house	S 17 year relationship
Subject 3 Mentor	Clerk Office Mgr.	C	AA	P Spiritual Communication with God.	1 brother 4 years older.	Rural	Tag, Baseball Ball Some dolls.	Cleaned house.	In a relationship.
Subject 4 Protégé	Clerk Clerk/Typist Rental Coun Selor	C	Some college	C Religious	10 Siblings Middle child 3 older brothers &a sister 2 younger brothers & 3 younger sisters	Rural Farm till 16, then City	Boys' games Baseball Skiing & Sledding	Housework & Ironing	M
Subject 5 Mentor	Clerk/Mail handler Phone Co.	C/H	MBA & BS	C Spiritual Not traditional. God made us & we respond to him.	6 Siblings 5th child 1 older sister 3 older brothers	City LA	Soldiers Marbles Baseball	Cooking & dishes.	M

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Subject 6 Mentor	Letter Carrier (M)	C	BA	Not religious Agnostic	1 younger sister	Rural	Writing (Mother was writer) Played fireman, Loner Ranger, Cowboys did mechanics, drove tractor at age 9.	Did laundry, hauled water No indoor plumbing. Mom died at age 10.	Widow
Subject 7 Protégé	LSM operator Retail clerk/ Cashier	C	Some college	P More spiritual than religious. Power of prayer	1 older sister 1 younger brother	Rural (Country)	Outside – running. Inside – dolls.	Not many chores.	D
Subject 8 Mentor	Technical Training Ctr. Teacher/Counselor	AA	BS	P Spiritual, not religious.	Only child.	`Rural (Ranch)	Played with animal (dog).	Many chores on farm. Got eggs.	M
Subject 9 Protégé	Clerk	C	AA	C Spiritual, yes! Belief in higher power, give control to Him.	Oldest, 1 sister & 2 brothers.	Suburbs.	"I was a good guy". Played house, dress-ups, marbles.	Some chores.	M

All like to work with men
Supervise between 10 and 65 men
All have some college
All did chores

Under Race:
C= caucasian
AA= African American
C/H = Hispanic

Under Religion:
P = Protestant
C = Catholic

Under Marital Status:
M = Married
D = Divorced
S = Single

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Assessment data is as follows. The LCI is a 24 item scale pairs agentic and communal words or phrases. Subjects are asked to evaluate each word or phrase from zero to 10 with zero meaning that you don't picture yourself that way at all, and ten meaning that you see yourself completely that way.

Table 1 illustrates the mean of the paired samples of the LCI. Note that all of the means except that for separateness is high.

Table 1
Paired Samples Statistics LCI

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 VO1 work-centered	7.33	9	1.87	.62
VO2 family centered	7.89	9	2.20	.73
Pair 2 VO3 job done	8.78	9	1.72	.57
VO4 express feeling	7.44	9	1.94	.65
Pair 3 VO5 provider	6.78	9	3.19	1.06
VO6 nurturer	6.78	9	3.07	1.02
Pair 4 VO7 justice	7.78	9	1.48	.49
VO8 mercy	6.56	9	1.51	.50
Pair 5 VO9 follow rules	7.78	9	1.39	.46
V10 fulfill needs	7.89	9	1.69	.56
Pair 6 V11 job-oriented	6.56	9	2.30	.77
V12 people-oriented	8.67	9	1.41	.47
Pair 7 V13 achieving	8.89	9	1.17	.39
V14 relating	7.89	9	1.62	.54
Pair 8 V15 competing	5.78	9	2.95	.98
V16 cooperate	8.44	9	.73	.24
Pair 9 V17 career	8.44	9	1.01	.34
V18 family	8.00	9	2.24	.75
Pair 10 V19	5.78	9	1.64	.55
Compartmentalized	7.67	9	1.41	.47
V20 interconnected				
Pair 11 V21 rational	8.56	9	.88	.29
V22 intuitive	8.78	9	.83	.28
Pair 12 V23 separateness	5.89	9	2.09	.70
V24 integration	7.11	9	1.05	.35
Pair 13 COMMUNE	93.1111	9	10.8679	3.6226
AGENCY	88.3333	9	11.2250	3.7417

Table 2 illustrates the paired sample correlations for the LCI.

Table 2

Paired Samples Correlations for the LCI

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	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 VO1 work-centered & VO2.family centered	9	.313	.412
Pair 2 VO3 job done & VO4 express feeling	9	.596	.091
Pair 3 VO5 provider & VO6 nurturer	9	.988	.000
Pair 4 VO7 justice & VO8 mercy	9	-.217	.574
Pair 5 VO9 follow rules & V10 fulfill needs-	9	.306	.423
Pair 6 V11 job-oriented & V12 people-oriented	9	.526	.146
Pair 7 V13 achieving & V14 relating	9	.192	.622
Pair 8 V15 competing & V16 cooperate	9	.227	.557
Pair 9 V17 career & V18 family	9	.276	.473
Pair 10 V19 Compartmentalized & V20 interconnected	9	.126	.747
Pair 11 V21 rational & V22 intuitive	9	.019	.962
Pair 12 V23 separateness & V24 integration	9	-.107	.784
Pair 13 COMMUNE & AGENCY	9	.568	.110

Table 3 illustrates the Paired Sample two tailed t test of the LCI.

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Table 3

Paired Samples Test – LCI

	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 VO1 work-centered - VO2 family centered	8	.508
Pair 2 VO3 job done - VO4 express feeling	8	.042*
Pair 3 VO5 provider - VO6 nurturer	8	1.000
Pair 4 VO7 justice - VO8 mercy	8	.155
Pair 5 VO9 follow rules - V10 fulfill needs	8	.860
Pair 6 V11 job-oriented - V12 people-oriented	8	.012*
Pair 7 V13 achieving - V14 relating	8	.135
Pair 8 V15 competing - V16 cooperate	8	.024*
Pair 9 V17 career - V18 family	8	.559
Pair 10 V19 Compartmentalized - V20 interconnected	8	.023*
Pair 11 V21 rational - V22 intuitive	8	.594
Pair 12 V23 separateness - V24 integration	8	.171
Pair 13 COMMUNE - AGENCY	8	.200

The four that are significant are marked with asterisks. Note that although there was no overall statistical significance between communal and agentic variables, the significant pairs 2, 6, 8, and 10 are all significant at the p ≤.05 level. Getting the job done is an agentic variable whereas people oriented cooperative and interconnected are communal variables. Perhaps these women do not have less agency at work than men; they simply go about it differently.

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This is born out by their scores on the first part of the ISAW. The ISAW lists 15 work satisfaction variables. Subjects score them on scale from zero to 10 indicating how important each variable is to their work satisfaction, with zero meaning not at all and 10 meaning completely so. The following Table 4, ranks the fifteen work related variables of the ISAW from most important to least for the women studied. (Note that all were important (and almost all agentic).

Table 4

Rank Order of ISAW Variables

ISAW Variable	ISAW Mean
Competence	9.7
Intellectual Stim	9.4
Empowerment	9.3
Success	9.3
Achievement	9.0
Productivity	9.0
Challenge	8.8
Leadership	8.7
Decision Making	8.6
Independence	8.3
Creativity	7.8
* Team Playing	7.8
Mission	7.8
Administration	7.8
* Executive Power	7.1

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The second part of the ISAW measures concepts of the supreme. On a scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely so), people state how important each of the variables is to them. The variables are creator, redeemer, judge, peacemaker, rescuer, love, protector, nurturer, forgiver, life giver, sustainer, all knowing presence, being, center of one's being. When compared with the work satisfaction variable achievement, statistically significant variables at the .05 level, are: redeemer (-.68), judge (-.67), peacemaker (-.7), rescuer (-.71) and forgiver (-.67). Note that all correlate negatively with achievement. However, creator (.67), redeemer (.72), rescuer (.68), and protector (.79) all correlate positively with mission. Creator (.67), redeemer (.72), peacemaker (.67), forgiver (.71), and life giver (.69) all correlate positively with the leadership at the .05 level. All variables except lover, nurturer, sustainer and all knowing correlate with team player at the .01 level of significance. Overall, women whose concept of the supreme is highest on the ISAW tend to score somewhat lower on achievement, decision making and challenge than do others. Bear in mind however, that all scores are quite high on work satisfaction variables (see table 4). Also remember that 8 of the 9 women interviewed claimed to be spiritual and have communication of some sort with the transcendent.

Only one item on the IS (Inventory on Spirituality) Rayburn, Richmond (1996, 1997) was used in this study. It was item 22 which states: "I see a spiritual side to my work or occupation." This item is scored on a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from almost never (1) to almost always (5). Item 22 correlates positively, as expected, with 9 of the 15 image of the Supreme variables on the ISAW and also correlates positively with team playing on the work satisfaction variables of the ISAW. The mean score for the 9 women on item 22 was 3.67 which is to say that as a group, the women sometimes to usually see a spiritual side to their occupation.

Lastly on the Bipolar Rating Scale (Piedmont, 1999), the women in this study were low on Neuroticism (X = 40.39, SD = 6.16), and high on conscientiousness (X – 68.47, SD = 4.91), which indicates that they appear to others rational, objective, steady, consistent, logical, decisive, concise, poised, practical, systematic and precise. This is the portrait of a typical male executive. However, they

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are also high on openness (X – 59.66, SD = 8.30), not like the typical male executive. This indicates that they are seen by others as unconventional and complex. Coupled with the high conscientiousness, the women are seen as perceptive, refined, industrious, informative, and perhaps cultured and perfectionist. High openness coupled with low neuroticism yields intelligence, innovation, cleanness, astuteness, and intellectualism. These women, on the BARS, are atypical.

Summary and Conclusions

The women in the Maintenance Leadership Development Program are surely unique in having been selected for a highly competitive program. They are also unique in that they selected a non-traditional career. But the dye was cast in childhood. They were engaged in non-traditional play. They report that they are not religious, but eight of the nine reported communicating with something that transcends themselves and influences their lives. They, by in large, come from middle America and middle to lower income. They have done traditional female type chores as children, and most have married and had children of their own. Birth order seems to have nothing to do with who they have become. When push comes to shove, the women studied are equally family and work centered, and are women who want to provide, as well as to nurture. They are rational and intuitive, more connected than compartmentalized, more cooperating than competing. However people oriented, the nine women are more achieving than relating. They get job satisfaction from competence, intellectual stimulation, empowerment and success, and these are far more important to them than traditional executive power. For the most part, they are open, team players.

It is possible that these women are both agentic and communal, but these words are too general and don't really describe them. What they are is multi-faceted, competent, open, non-neurotic women who value work and home, achievement, success, intellectual stimulation, and connectedness to other people. One might argue that the population studied is small. Agreed. One might say that the instruments used in the study weren't fully normed. Also agreed. But just maybe there may be more

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women like these who should be studied, and maybe even these have something to say to us. One more comparison needs to be made though it was not reported earlier because it lacks statistical significance. These women who value both justice and mercy, value justice somewhat more. This is a controversial finding in the light of what has been previously written about women.

One of the women, the one who played with dolls, told the following about herself. "I was a shy child, but I stretched myself. I didn't know what I could do, but in the past 6 months, I got a new position and a new husband. I even surprised myself and jumped out of an airplane to conquer fear." Agentic, maybe. Amazing, Yes!

Addendum

The following should also be noted:

1. Postal Service employees are often characterized as unhappy, unfulfilled; and disgruntled. However, tis study shows that these women managers find satisfaction in their jobs.

2. The women are in a non-traditional career field. They have worked hard to achieve their success. The majority did not feel they had been discriminated against in their career.

3. This study provides a basis for further study of the nine women with regard to their feelings about spirituality and their careers. It also encourages future study of a far larger sample of women, spirituality, and work.

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